

Computer users can chat on-line



O&E
ONLINE

Most of us are so used to talking on the telephone that we don't give it a second thought. In the future, talking with a keyboard will feel just as natural.

Right now, though, the uninitiated often believe that talking to another computer user electronically is unnatural, stilted, if not downright weird.

The practice of talking to another PC user online is known as "chat." This is done on bulletin boards, such as O&E Online.

Chat is simultaneous conversation. Your computer monitor is split into two parts. On the lower part you type the words you wish to speak. When you hit RETURN, the message appears on the upper half of the screen for other users to see. You are "private" or talking to yourself when you are typing the words on the lower half. As soon as you hit RETURN, you go public and your words are seen by all users who are in the "chat" area.

Electronic chat is very popular with many PC users. Teenagers like chat and will hang out and gab in chat much like teens of an earlier era hung out on the phone. But people in their 30s and 40s also enjoy chat. It's a chance to meet new people and chat with strangers, much like people do on Citizen Band radio channels.

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O&E Online offers two chat options: local chat and international chat. Today let's try local chat. Next we'll try the Internet's International Relay Chat (IRC).

Local chat option is on the main menu after you sign in. The option "Chat" is almost in the middle of the menu selection. To enter chat, type the letter "C."

Upon entering, you are shown a list of other users in chat. The list will show their user names (often nicknames). When you enter, other users chatting receive a notification that you have arrived.

Often users stop their conversation, greet you, and then return to the chat in progress.

Immediately upon entering chat, you will also see the conversation going on at that moment. Visible is the user's nickname followed by the message. When people greet you, simply type "hi" and the person's name who greeted you, i.e., "hi Greg" or "hi everyone." With greetings out of the way, you might want to just sit still and "listen in" on what is being talked about. In chat, IRC or in other on-line discussions groups, it is always smart to monitor the talk before jumping in.

Sometimes, though, if there are not too many folks chatting, other users will address you personally

with questions after the greeting. If so, don't be rude. Simply type an answer and get into the flow -- reading responses and typing your answer. The name of the other user will always appear on the screen to the left of his message. When you enter a message, your name will appear to them in the same way.

Stay relaxed. This is new, so don't tense up. Type your normal speed. If you get rattled and rush your typing, you make mistakes and slow your response time. When you make a mistake, you can select "Control X" to erase your line. "Control H" deletes the character to the left of the cursor.

Keep messages short. A sentence of about 8-12 words is good. Most PC users are impatient and won't sit around wondering if you are going to respond. If there's not a quick response because you are typing an epic, they will start talking with another user. Additionally, most PC users don't want to take the time to read a paragraph. So use short sentences in chat.

In local chat there are not many commands you need to know. Type /help or ? to view the commands. If you have lost who's in chat, type /s to list the chatters. To leave chat, type /q. As you leave, the other users will see a

message announcing your exit so they won't try to talk to you when you aren't there. You might miss the exit message so if you are talking to someone and they don't answer, type /s to see who's there.

You can enter private chat. Only users in private chat can see messages being entered. When another user enters chat, he sees a list of those in private chat along with those who are chatting publicly. To enter private chat, type /p. I'm not sure why users go into private chat. It seems like a contradiction of the open spirit of chat. Maybe I don't want to know.

There is an online tradition of exchanging insults (flame throwing). Flame throwing is within the boundaries of acceptable behavior online. Users who feel uncomfortable with chat because of flame or any other irritating dialogues could avoid using chat and enjoy other areas of our on-line service. If the offensive chat involves sexual harassment, notify the system operator immediately.

So try chat. If you like it, great. If not, that's great too. Next week, we will look at Internet Relay Chat (IRC) and practice talking with PC users throughout the world and nation.

You can direct questions to Emory Daniels by e-mail with emory@goonline.com, at voice mail at 953-2047 then dial 1810, or fax number 591-7279. To sign up for O&E On-Line, dial (313) 591-0903, at "log-in" prompt type "new" and at "Access:" prompt type GLANY2.

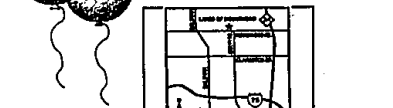
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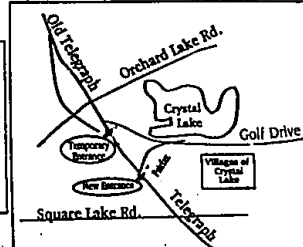
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